

SC008485

Registered provider: Choices Home for Children Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is privately owned and run. It is registered to provide care for up to six children who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Four children were being cared for in the home at the time of inspection.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in February 2021. She has recently submitted her resignation.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 24 and 25 November 2020 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 7 to 8 July 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected and their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 11 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: declined in effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/02/2020	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
09/07/2019	Full	Good
06/02/2019	Full	Requires improvement to be good
13/11/2018	Full	Inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Poor practice in relation to admissions to the home and a lack of effective leadership and management have had a significant negative effect on the overall experiences and progress of some children.

Two children have been admitted to the home in an unplanned manner. Sufficient information has not been sought to help staff plan effectively for their care. Information contained in admission records is not always accurate and, in some cases, records contain information which relates to other children in the home. Staff do not have the information needed to inform decision-making and plan effectively for the children's placements.

Three children have left the home after a short time as staff have been unable to meet their needs. This has exposed them to further risks in the community and led to more change and instability in their lives.

Some children have formed negative alliances. They have gone missing together and become involved in significant risk-taking behaviours which have placed them at risk of serious harm.

The inability of staff to manage the behaviour of some children effectively has had a negative effect on the emotional well-being and physical safety of other children living in the home. Children who might otherwise be in a position to make greater progress are held back by a home environment which, at times, has felt unsafe or been upsetting for them.

Staff have spent a significant amount of time over recent months trying to respond to the challenges presented by the behaviours of some children. This has led to some staff feeling at times overwhelmed and unable to undertake all aspects of their roles in a planned and timely manner.

Insufficient time has been taken between unsuccessful placements of children to allow the staff team, including the registered manager, to reflect and learn. This means that a pattern has continued of children being admitted to the home without adequate care and attention being paid to their needs.

Two children who have been at the home for a prolonged period have been supported well by staff, and staff have a good understanding of their needs. One child with a long-term health condition is being supported to take increasing responsibility for the administration of his medication. This supports his growing independence and self-confidence.

A whistle-blowing complaint received by Ofsted raised concerns about practice in the home and the lack of effective leadership and management. These concerns were

considered as part of the inspection. A number of these concerns were validated by practice seen on inspection.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: inadequate

Practice in relation to pre-admission risk assessments and the matching of children is inadequate. Failure to assess risks and strategies effectively has meant children have not been appropriately safeguarded.

Assessments lack significant information and are not completed in a timely manner. A child identified for a planned admission to the home was previously living in a secure setting. Despite this being a planned admission to the home, the child's pre-admission assessment was completed on the day of his admission.

The assessment lacks the necessary information about the child to inform effective decision-making around the suitability of the placement. In particular, the assessment does not address why the child had been looked after in a secure setting for a prolonged period of time and what his needs would be once living in a non-secure setting. Staff were unable to meet his needs and his placement ended in an unplanned manner.

Placement plans and risk assessments are not completed in a timely way, so do not support good care planning and risk management. One child did not have a placement plan written until she had been living at the home for six weeks. This plan was then written by a member of staff who does not work at the home and is not responsible for the day-to-day care of the child. As such, that member of staff is not in a position to undertake a child-centred assessment which identifies the individual needs of the child.

A significant delay in developing risk assessments for one child meant that, for a number of weeks, staff did not have formal strategies in place to respond to high levels of risk associated with self-harm and missing-from-care episodes.

Significant incidents in the home, including physical interventions with children, are generally recorded well. This recording is detailed and provides a clear understanding of the incident and the actions of children and staff. However, these records are not consistently evaluated by the registered manager or senior staff acting on her behalf. As a result, it is not clear how the registered manager uses the feedback from these events to improve practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Leadership and management of the home are ineffective. In relation to admissions to the home, there is a lack of evidence of transparency and responsibility by the registered manager. As a result, there is no accountability for these decisions. This is having a significant effect on children's lives.

The responsible individual is aware that decision-making has been ineffective and that the registered manager has been unable to fulfil her regulatory responsibilities in relation to admissions to the home. The responsible individual has failed to intervene and provide support to the registered manager. This has resulted in a number of inappropriate placements for children.

The registered manager and an experienced and skilled deputy manager have recently resigned from their posts. As a result, there are significant imminent changes to the leadership and management of the home which will affect staff and children.

The registered manager has failed to ensure that the updated statement of purpose is shared with Ofsted. In addition, Ofsted was not notified of the registered manager's recent absence from the home and the interim management arrangements put in place. This meant that Ofsted was unable to assess the suitability of these arrangements or have effective oversight.

Staff have not been receiving regular supervision in line with the organisation's supervision policy. The registered manager has also not ensured that all staff have supervision from a person with the necessary professional skills, knowledge and experience. Waking night staff are supervised by a member of staff employed in an administrative role within the wider organisation. As a result, these staff are not being provided with the professional oversight they need to undertake their roles effectively. In addition, children's personal information is being shared, which breaches their confidentiality.

The main communal areas of the home provide children with a spacious and welcoming family environment. This quality of the environment is not sustained throughout the home. The decor of children's bedrooms is dated and some walls need maintenance. The bathroom has mould around the bath and accessories are rusted and broken. There is a broken floor tile in the toilet upstairs and the downstairs toilet has a window with no covering. All these things mean that children are not being provided with an environment which makes them feel valued and where their privacy is respected.

The record of admission and discharges of children from the home is inaccurate and incomplete. Consequently, there is a lack of accountability and clarity about children's time at the home and the arrangements for their care when they leave.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
* The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— lead and manage the home in a way that is consistent with the approach and ethos, and delivers the outcomes, set out in the home's statement of purpose. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that— ■ roles and responsibilities of the leadership team are organised in such a way that the registered manager and responsible individual can fulfil their leadership and management obligations in respect of decision-making about admission to the home; ■ there is a clear audit trail in place that evidences who has made decisions in relation to the admission of children to the home; ■ staff are appropriately supervised in order to deliver the outcomes of the statement of purpose, with regard to ensuring that children's confidentiality is maintained.	5 September 2021
* The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and	5 September 2021

have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that arrangements are in place to— ensure the effective induction of each child into the home; manage and review the placement of each child in the home; and plan for, and help, each child to prepare to leave the home or to move into adult care in a way that is consistent with arrangements agreed with the child’s placing authority. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(i)(ii)(iii)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that— ■ all available information is obtained before a decision is made about a child’s admission to the home, taking into consideration the needs of the child being admitted and the needs of children already living in the home; ■ placement plans are completed in a timely manner on a child’s admission to the home by staff who have day-to-day care of the child and that the information contained in plans is accurate; ■ pre-admission assessments and placement plans inform the day-to-day care of each child in order to progress the local authority’s plans for the child and reduce the likelihood of children leaving the home in an unplanned manner.	
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child’s relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child;	27 August 2021

help each child to understand how to keep safe; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv))	
Schedule 4 sets out the other information that the registered person must keep in relation to a children's home. The registered person must— maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4; ensure that the records are kept up to date. (Regulation 37 (1) (2)(a)(b)) Schedule 4 A record in the form of a register showing in respect of each child— the date of the child's admission to the home; the date on which the child ceased to be accommodated in the home; the child's address immediately before being accommodated in the home; the child's address on leaving the home; the child's placing authority; and the statutory provision (if any) under which the child is accommodated.	27 August 2021
The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b))	27 August 2021
The registered person must give notice in writing to HMCI, as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so, if any of the following events take place or are expected by the registered person to take place— a person other than the registered person carries on or manages the children's home. (Regulation 49(a))	27 August 2021

The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(a)(b))	27 August 2021
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* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that paintwork throughout the home is cleaned, a window covering is put on the downstairs toilet door, the decor in children's bedrooms is updated and damage repaired, and that bathrooms are cleaned and the rusted and broken items are replaced. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC008485

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Choices Home for Children Limited

Registered provider address: 31 Wellington Road, Nantwich CW5 7ED

Responsible individual: Simon Haddrell

Registered manager: Maxine Toon

Inspector

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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